

## **1999 Annual Report Executive Summary**

### **East Arkansas Enterprise Community**

On December 21, 1994, President Bill Clinton announced thirty-one (31) rural areas to be designated as Enterprise Communities and three (3) rural areas to be designated as Empowerment Zones. Designations were formally made on April 27, 1995 and were published in the Federal Register. Since its designation as an Enterprise Community established by the federal government (USDA) through Round I EZ/EC designated funding in 1995, the East Arkansas Enterprise Community (EAEC) has had a profound impact on the social and economic well-being of the people of the area. The Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities (EZ/EC) Initiative is a program designated to help distressed areas improve themselves. It is a ten- (10) year process of partnership for economic and social development, and demonstration in rural areas.

The EAEC opened its office in September 1995 and is a community organization providing support to a Service Area which encompasses six (6) census tracts within four (4) contiguous counties (portions of Cross, Lee, Monroe and St. Francis Counties); and eleven (11) small towns/cities (Brinkley, Caldwell, Colt, Fargo, Hughes, Madison, Moro, Palestine, Widener, Wheatley, and Wynne). However, the impact of this organization covers the entire Arkansas Delta Region. Federal, state and private dollars have been leveraged to gain maximum benefits for each dollar spent in the area. The EAEC also collaborates with and supports EC Champion Communities within a fifty-(50) mile radius. Champion Communities are those communities that went through the EZ/EC planning process, but did not receive designations.

In September 1997, the EAEC Board of Directors selected the Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation (ALFDC) to serve as the interim lead entity/fiscal agent - this selection was as a result of the initial lead entity's discontinuation of operation. The EAEC retained a part-time volunteer coordinator and a part-time office manager and reopened the EAEC office, which had been closed since July. The EAEC office moved to a new location and, under the direction of the Board, continued to move forward and revitalize its planning process. The EAEC Board continued to move forward restructuring its initial plan and implementing efforts to leverage resources through letters of support for program initiatives by other non-profit partners and local and county government within the four (4) county and eleven (11) town/community census tract service area.

While the initial implementation efforts were meaningful, the most significant accomplishment of the EAEC was the consummation of the task of obtaining approval of a new lead entity and fiscal agent from the State (DHS) on February 5, 1999. The EAEC and its Board of Directors operated without an agreement from September 1997 through February 1999 (17 months). This accomplishment motivated communities to again review their status and reevaluate their goals to assure the maximum benefits of the EC to its service area.

Full community participation was achieved through public meetings and election of new Board Members. The continuing problems faced were overcoming social and economic shortages, and the 17 months of downtime. Effective solutions raised the capacity of people to address and react to those conditions. The EAEC worked with the community and re-established short and long-term goals.

The EAEC committed 43 awards for a total of \$735,367 (from February 5 - December 31, 1999). These commitments projected to leverage \$10,075,000. The EC established eleven (11) Benchmarks. The priority of these benchmarks is Human, Community and Economic Development. They specifically

address youth opportunity and development, health, elderly services, finance, jobs, infrastructure and agriculture.